The Iron Fireman Manufacturing Company

Established in 1923 - Portland, Oregon

PURPOSE: This report documents the history and uses of the Iron Fireman building at 4784 and 4644 SE 17th Avenue, Portland, Oregon (*Iron Fireman Collective*). This report is written in support of the appeal submitted to the City of Portland administrative board, to establish the legal occupancy classifications and corresponding occupant load factors for the facility located at 4784 SE 17th Avenue, as of October 1st, 2004. The intent is to provide a more complete picture to the reader of the nature of the manufacturing, storage, and business activities in the Iron Fireman Collective using relevant historical documents and identify where in the building these activities occurred. This report used available primary sources to document the history of the businesses that owned or occupied the building from 1923 to 2015 and how they used the spaces over the years.

EARLY YEARS: As early as the 1920's, the area of the Brooklyn neighborhood from 17th and Powell to Schiller Street was an industrial district, taking advantage of its proximity to the railroad.[1] This type of manufacturing district was common across the US. In Portland, businesses such as Iron Fireman, The Product Engineering Company, and Crawford and Doherty Foundry began in this neighborhood.

Iron Fireman Manufacturing Company circa 1920's, source: Oregon Historical Society, reference number, 371N5631.

As for manufacturing and warehouse buildings, while we might think of them as basic, blocky buildings, they called for architectural ingenuity. An industrial building needed space for labor intensive work to occur, an area for storage of bulky products, a front office for executive, accounting, sales, and marketing employees, rooms with good light for product development and draftsmen, and an attractive display area to showcase goods. An abundance of natural light was required for processing raw materials, machining of parts, and the assembly of goods. The large windows also provided fresh air. A building of this type also had to accommodate railway spurs to deliver goods to distributors. All these features are evident for the Iron Fireman Collective building, including the vital intercontinental connections from the nearby Brooklyn railyard with the Southern Pacific Railroad with connections to the Central Pacific Railroad.

[1] https://pamplinmedia.com/sb/75-features/152141-light-rail-construction-claims-part-of-peco-manufacturing, Light rail construction claims part of PECO Manufacturing
Dana Beck, May 10, 2013.

Thomas Henry Banfield and Cyrus Jury Parker had a successful contracting business that built bridges[2] and prominent Portland buildings.[3] The company needed a reliable supply of iron for their construction projects purchased the small Portland Wire and Iron Works in 1923. Portland Wire and Iron Works designed a machine (called a "stoker") that was supposed to automatically add coal to furnaces and boilers, but apparently it did not work all that well. Parker redesigned the stoker and named it "The Iron Fireman" and formed a new company. The company adopted a tin man (robot) shoveling coal as its logo. By the late 1920's, Iron Fireman added plants and warehouses in Cleveland, Ohio and St. Louis, Missouri.

In 1924, Iron Fireman Manufacturing Company took over the outdated Coin Manufacturing Company and built a massive building at Schiller Street to meet all the company's requirements. The Iron Fireman Building, a heating and furnace factory, is one of the few buildings still standing in the neighborhood as a reminder of the 1920-30's era.

Iron Fireman Stokers ready for shipping, source: Oregon State University, Special Collections and Archives.

INNOVATIVE PRODUCT AND MANUFACTURING PROCESS: Iron Fireman was at the forefront of the heating industry to create time released and temperature control heating by coal, and later by oil. The Iron Fireman products were used to heat commercial, industrial, and residential buildings. Shown are some of the large commercial products produced at the Portland plant.

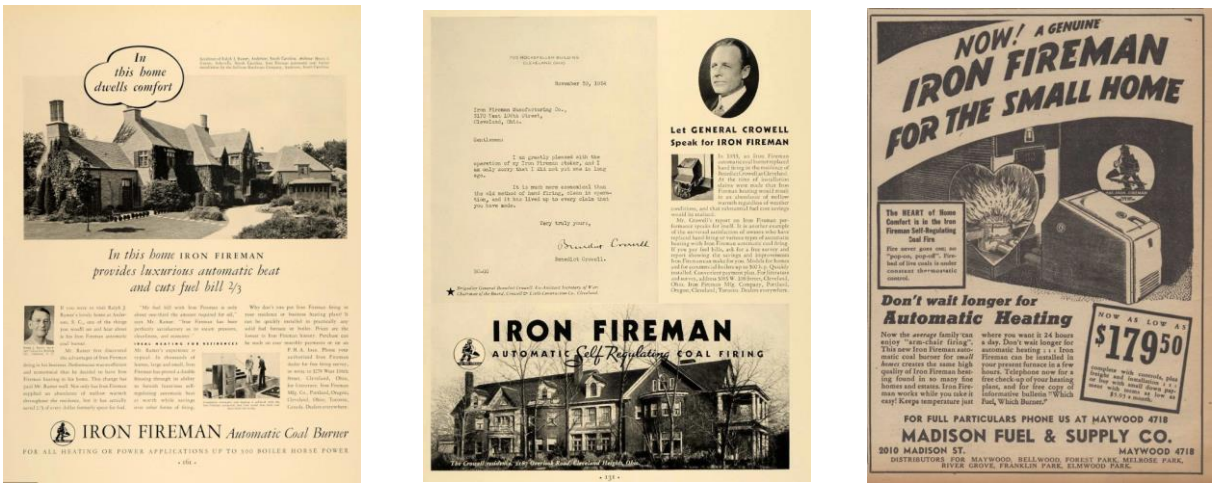
As early as 1927, Mr. Haskell Carter, Product Manager and Chief Engineer, a former employee of the Ford motor company started to implement Henry Ford's innovations of standardization, no wasted movements, no wasted materials, just in time manufacturing[4] at Iron Fireman. Most of the sales were in the eastern United States, because of the availability of coal. In 1928, Iron Fireman established a warehouse in Cleveland, Ohio to store stokers. This meant only needed materials were stored at the Iron Fireman Building in Portland, which instead was used to create products for just-in-time delivery. These innovations caused the Head of the Accounting Department to write that he was concerned that all the material was not going through a storeroom and issued out for proper accounting. Carter was using a conveyor system to streamline the process. Another of Carter's innovations was putting assembly tables on wheels or

[2] Some of the bridges they built: Vista Avenue Viaduct, Portland; Canyon Creek Bridge, Douglas County, Oregon and Rock Point Bridge, Jackson County, Oregon.
[3] Some Portland buildings built by Parker and Banfield: Hawthorne and Buckman schools; Washington High School, and Temple Beth El.
[4] Ford, Jr., Henry, My Life and Work: An Autobiography of Henry Ford, New York, 1922.

bins at each of the workbenches, so that all materials could be stored along the line in proper sequence. [5]

Iron Fireman Commercial Heating Ads circa 1930s

Smaller stoker and furnace products for the residential market were also created on site.


In this home dwells comfort
In this home IRON FIREMAN provides luxurious automatic heat and cuts fuel bill ⅓
IRON FIREMAN Automatic Coal Burner
Let GENERAL CROWELL Speak for IRON FIREMAN
IRON FIREMAN
AUTOMATIC Self-Regulating COAL FIRING
NOW! A GENUINE IRON FIREMAN FOR THE SMALL HOME
Don't wait longer for Automatic Heating
$179.50
MADISON FUEL & SUPPLY CO.

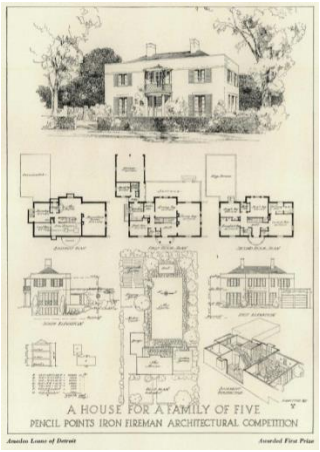
Iron Fireman Residential Heating Ads circa 1930s

The large furnaces and coal stokers were manufactured on site and shipped across the country by rail. Later a storage building was built east of 18th Avenue, closer to the railroad.

[5] Carter, Haskell C. Haskell C. Carter Memoirs, Product Manager and Chief Engineer, Iron Fireman Manufacturing 1926-1951, 1982.

CARLOAD SHIPMENT OF
IRON FIREMAN
Automatic COAL BURNER
Made by The Iron Fireman Mfg. Co. Portland, Ore.
FOR THE
AUTOMATIC STOKER SALES CO.
SALT LAKE CITY and DENVER

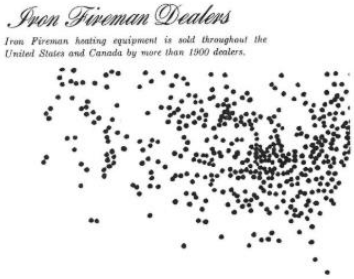
Railcars of Iron Fireman Stokers and Furnaces circa 1930s



MARKETING DIRECT TO CUSTOMER AND STORING AT THE POINT OF SALE IN DISTRIBUTOR WAREHOUSE/SHOWROOMS: Iron Fireman promoted its products with aggressive print ads in trade magazines and journals, the Saturday Evening Post, Time magazine and local newspapers. The company also utilized direct mail advertisements sent to business and homeowners. All the advertising was backed up by a network of dealers and door to door salesmen. In 1935, Iron Fireman Manufacturing Company sponsored a residential architectural competition to "design of the house for gracious living" including the Iron Fireman heating system in the basement.

One company newsletter relates a story about the owner of one of these furnaces who was not willing to live without it, and instead he relocated it four times as he moved houses!

Iron Fireman had a showroom in Portland and in locations across the US, as well as a team of sales representatives to sell products to homeowners and businesses. The company also used distributors in showrooms across the country to promote and sell the products. All these dealers and markets were managed from the headquarters in Portland – what is now known as the Iron Fireman Collective but at the time would have been called "Plant 1".


Iron Fireman Dealers
Iron Fireman heating equipment is sold throughout the United States and Canada by more than 1900 dealers.

Iron Fireman Distributors circa 1940s

Iron Fireman Showroom, Kenosha, WI 1947

Iron Fireman Sales Conferences, Salt Lake City, UT

1940 Iron Fireman Catalog

The second floor of Plant 1 was the headquarters for the back-office work of the company including: sales, advertising, product development, and personnel.[6] Iron Fireman Annual Reports list the address for the general and divisional sales offices and manufacturing units as 4784 SE 17th Avenue.[7] Iron Fireman Manufacturing Company Annual Reports and several issues of The Iron Man company newsletter refer to people and specific departments working on the second floor of the building, such as the Order and Billing, Purchasing, Production Planning and Costs/Accounting Departments.

The Annual Reports list the addresses of each of the company's facilities. In the 1946 Annual Report, the General Offices, Manufacturing Unit, Retail Sales and Divisional Sales were all listed as 4784 SE 17th Avenue.[8] By 1947 the Retail Sales Offices moved across the street to 4629 SE 17th Avenue.[9]

Production Planning Department
Source of Supply
THE PRODUCTION PLANNING DEPARTMENT orders materials and keeps records of all material receivables and disbursements. They plan the usage of these materials so that parts will be made in such a way as to come out at the assembly line in balanced groups and on time so that assembly schedules may be met.

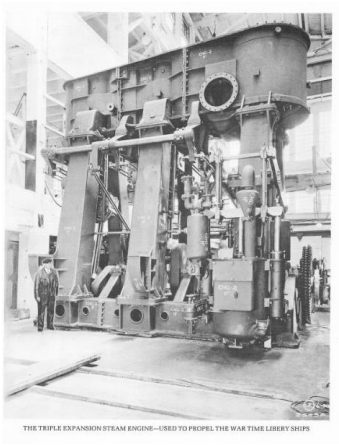
Order and Billing Dep't.
Upper: Elmer Howard; lower: George Martin. Mary Hopkins, Alyce Hines, Rosemary Snodgrass, Doris Duckett, Mabel Evans, Jean Smith.

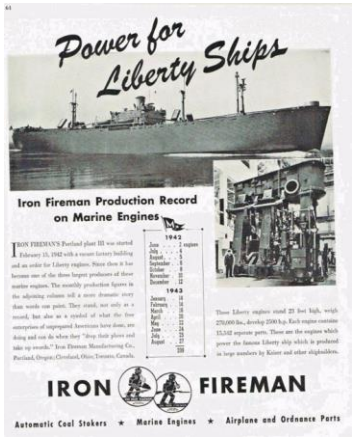
Iron Fireman Work Descriptions, The Iron Man 1945, and 1946 and the 1948 Annual Report

[6] The Iron Man, Iron Fireman Manufacturing Company Employee Newsletter, March 1945 p 8.
[7] Iron Fireman Annual Report 1948.
[8] Iron Fireman Annual Report 1946.
[9] Iron Fireman Annual Report 1947.

When the furnaces and stokers became electronically controlled in the 1930s, Iron Fireman expanded its electronics operation into a third plant in Portland. This is when the original plant (today the Iron Fireman Collective) became known as Plant 1. Plant 1 was the primary manufacturing plant for the company.

INNOVATIVE MANUFACTURING PROCESSES AND WELL-TRAINED LABOR ALLOWED QUICK SWITCH IN PRODUCTS DURING AND AFTER WORLD WAR II: During World War II Iron Fireman became part of the war effort and was instrumental in building engines and parts for the Liberty Ships produced at the Kaiser Shipyard. Each engine weighed 270,000 pounds and Iron Fireman was under contract to produce 30 engines per month. The 100th engine came off the line on April 12, 1945. These engines were fabricated at "Plant 2" on SW Harbor Drive and SW Front Avenue (now Naito Parkway).

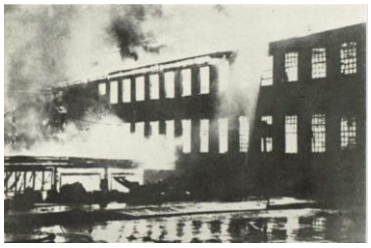

THE TRIPLE EXPANSION STEAM ENGINE—USED TO PROPEL THE WAR TIME LIBERY SHIPS


Power for Liberty Ships
Iron Fireman Production Record on Marine Engines
IRON FIREMAN
Automatic Coal Stokers ★ Marine Engines ★ Airplane and Ordnance Parts

December 1945

Iron Fireman produces its 200th Victory Ship engine, August 20,1945

In addition to Liberty Ship Engines, Iron Fireman designed and constructed 125 Iron Fireman Snow Cruisers at the same plant.



Iron Fireman Manufacturing, Plant 2 in 1944 above, burned down in February 1945.

The Iron Fireman Snow Cruisers were tested on Mount Hood, Oregon.

During WWII, Plant 1 was expanded to produce airplane parts for The Boeing Company, while maintaining stoker production. The plane parts produced at the plant were wing and landing gear assemblies.[10] Plant 1 fabricated landing gear supports for B17s and B29s, wing fittings, and hand retraction gear mechanisms.

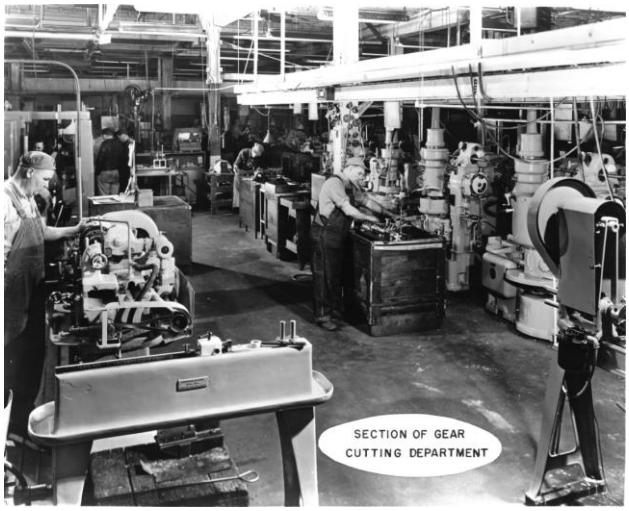
The photographs on the following pages show how spaces were used inside Plant 1 where airplane parts were manufactured for The Boeing Company. As discussed further below, Boeing manufacturing work continued in the building until 2016. For this reason, these photographs provide evidence of how interior spaces at the Iron Fireman Collective were occupied as of October 1, 2004.

POST WORLD WAR II –AVIATION AND BOEING ERA BEGINS FOR COMMERCIAL PLANES: After World War II, Iron Fireman continued to manufacture aircraft components for Boeing. Plant 1 (the Iron Fireman Collective) retained many of its long-time employees who transferred their skill in making stokers to the machining of aircraft parts. The plant was well equipped with machine tools and the facilities operated at near capacity.

In 1948, Iron Fireman moved its US production of stokers and furnaces to Cleveland, Ohio. The Canadian production was done at its plant in Toronto, Ontario.[11]

[10] Iron Fireman Annual Report 1944.
[11] Iron Fireman Annual Report 1948.

Iron Fireman Manufacturing Company continues to build parts for The Boeing Company
circa late 1950s – early 1960's



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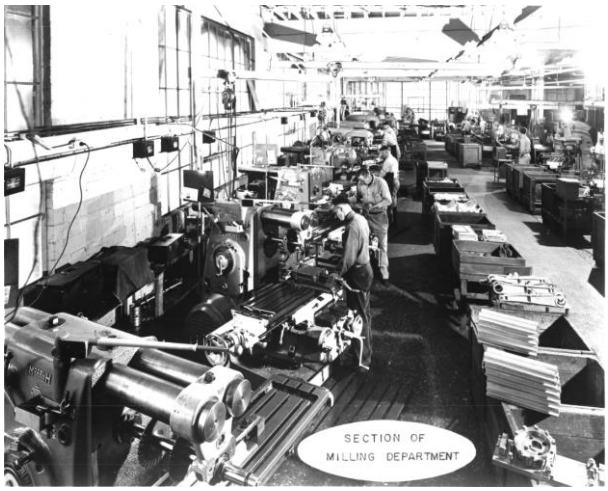
[12] The assembly work in the images "Section of Aircraft Assembly Department" shows work on steering components of Boeing 707 airplanes. The Boeing 707 went into production in 1955. Source: Interview with Mr. Terry Dollens, Boeing Machinist and assembler of time capsule for The Boeing Company, Troutdale, Oregon.

VIEW OF TURRET
LATHE DEPARTMENT

SECTION OF
MILLING DEPARTMENT

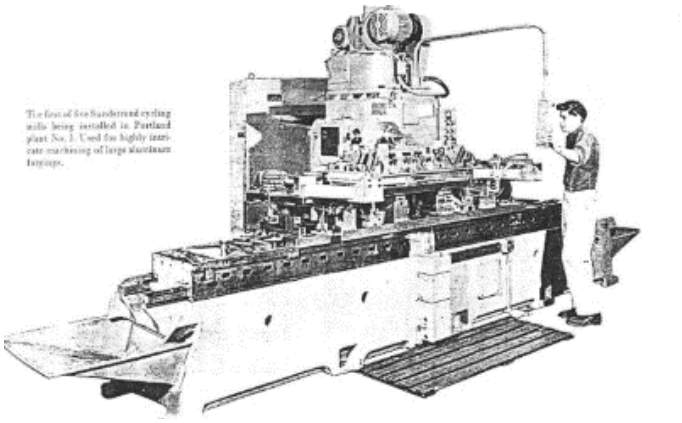
SECTION OF LIGHT
AND MEDIUM DRILL
DEPARTMENT

SECTION OF
MAGNETIC INSPECTION
& HEAT TREAT DEPTS.

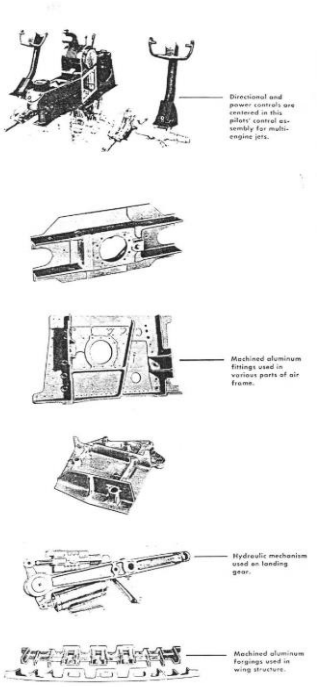

SECTION OF
MILLING DEPARTMENT

SECTION OF
GRINDING DEPARTMENT

Plant 1 (the Iron Fireman Collective) was updated numerous times in the 1950s to meet the new technologies required for the nascent airplane industry. The electronics division of the company moved to 19000 NE Sandy Boulevard, Troutdale, Oregon, where it is now part of The Boeing Company.[13]



The first of five Sunstrand cycling mills being installed in Portland plant no. 1. Used for highly intricate machining of large aluminum forgings.



From top: Directional power controls, Machined aluminum fittings, Hydraulic mechanism used on landing gear, and Machined aluminum fittings used in wing structure fabricated in the plant images on the previous pages.

In 1961, Iron Fireman merged its aviation business with the Electronics Specialties Company (ESCO). Space Conditioning, Inc. bought the Fuel and Heating business in 1963 and the stoker business was sold to the Will-Burt Company in 1966.

CHAPTER TWO FOR THE IRON FIREMAN COLLECTIVE: Around this time, the Product Engineering Company leased Plant 1 and renamed it the "East Plant."

Product Engineering Company (PECO)[14] was established in 1932 by Ralph 'Mac' Mcgilvra, a former employee of the Iron Fireman Company. The company began in the northeast corner of 4707 SE 17th Avenue across the street from the Iron Fireman Collective building. The business involved various manufacturing products, including tool and die casting, fabrication and finishing, and later added injection molding. PECO evolved into a designer and manufacturer of highly engineered commercial aerospace interior components and systems for the aerospace industry. PECO specializes in Passenger Service Units (PSUs) which incorporate air handling, emergency oxygen, electrical power management and cabin lighting systems. It also manufactures a wide range of fuel access doors that meet stringent strength, fuel sealing and anti-corrosion requirements.[15]

Most of PECO's operations were located across the street at 4707 (West Plant) and 4777 SE 17th Avenue (known as the "Walker Building"). Originally PECO did not need the entire space

[13] Iron Fireman Annual Reports, 1956 and 1958.
[14] Product Engineering Company did not officially use the name PECO until 1967. It is used in the remainder of the document for continuity.
[15] Astronics (July 18, 2013) Astronics Corporation Completes Acquisition of PECO Inc. and Amends Senior Credit Facilities [Press Release] Retrieved from https://investors.astronics.com/news-events/press-releases/detail/7/astronics-corporation-completes-acquisition-of-peco-inc

and leased portions of the building to other entities, including at one time a truck trailer assembly business. PECO ultimately purchased the Iron Fireman Collective.

PECO Boardroom, Iron Fireman Manufacturing Building – Portland Tribune

A Department of Environment Quality 2005 inspection[16] of the PECO buildings states the site operations in the East Plant include plastic injection molding and finishing, the manufacturing and assembly of thermal sensors and airplane parts (including personal service units), and warehousing/storage. PECO's operations also included both the 34,000 square foot West Plant and the 12,000 square foot Walker building. The West Plant housed the tool and die casting, machine shop operations and some storage. The small screw machining operation and a large parts storage area were in the Walker Building. In 2006, PECO converted the Walker Building for parts finishing operations, which include coating, painting, and associated surface preparations.

The East Plant (Iron Fireman Collective) was also the location of the screw machine shop until it was moved in 1989. PECO filled a wide range of machine production needs as requested by clients including the US Post Office for postal carts and Willamette Valley farmers for berry flats. Over the years, PECO produced passenger service units, which are the overhead units with lights and vents above seats on airplanes, overhead light assemblies, and oxygen diffusers for Boeing's 707, 737, and 757 airplanes in the East Plant.[17] This production continued until Astronics Corporation moved production to Clackamas, Oregon in 2016.[18]

PECO used the unique first floor administrative offices in the building, once occupied by the Iron Fireman Company. Hand crafted and carved polished wood paneling along the walls contained hidden closets and compartments, and all three rooms are filled with stained glass windows not often found in offices built for business executives.

The second floor of the Iron Fireman Collective on the east side of the building was occupied by the thermostat engineering and assembly groups.[19] [20] Additionally, during PECO's tenure, the

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[16] Pettit, Don, Project Manager "File Review for PECO Manufacturing Company Facility – Portland, Oregon" Received by PECO Manufacturing Company, Inc. – ECSI File No. 1973, 2002, Portland, Oregon, p. 4.
[17] Astronics PECO Receiving Contract Extension with Boeing to Provide Interior and Structural Components, Engineering.com, April 2019.
[18] About Astronics PECO - History
[19] Don Pettit to PECO Manufacturing Company, Inc. – ECSI File No. 1973, June 6, 2002, "File Review for PECO Manufacturing Company Facility – Portland, Oregon," Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.
[20] Personal interview with Gerald Blount, Retired Manufacturing Engineer, PECO Manufacturing Company, 13 May 2020.

second story of the original Iron Fireman buildings (the southern end of the Iron Fireman Collective) was used periodically by Portland Wire and Iron Company's drafting department.

TIMELINE OF IRON FIREMAN BUILDING
4784 SE 17TH AVENUE

1912	Thomas Henry Banfield & Cyrus Jury Parker incorporate the Parker & Banfield Company, construction contractors.
1923	Parker and Banfield Company purchase Portland Wire & Iron Works Company and form Iron Fireman Company.
1924	Iron Fireman Company takes over the Coin Machine Manufacturing Company at 984 SE 17th Avenue (now 4784 SE 17th Avenue). Iron Fireman Company constructs building for offices and manufacturing use.
1927	Opens offices and plants in Cleveland, OH and Saint Louis, MO
1928	Cyrus Jury Parker is killed in plane crash, Thomas Henry Banfield was injured in the same crash.
1939	Ralph McGilvra starts Product Engineering Company at 4707 SE 17th Avenue.
1941	Iron Fireman begins war time production of parts for Boeing's B29 aircraft.
1945	World War II ends, Plant 2 burns down, Iron Fireman continues to produce parts for Boeing.
1948	Iron Fireman moves all US stoker and furnace production to Cleveland, Ohio, and Canadian production to Toronto.
1955	Boeing begins production of the 707. Iron Fireman produces steering columns, flap pedals and other parts.
1961	Iron Fireman merges with Electronic Specialties Company (ESCO).
1962	Ralph McGilvra, Owner & President of Product Engineering Co. died.
1963	NWI purchased Product Engineering Company Iron Fireman sells fuel burner & heating control business to Space Conditioning, Inc., Harrisonburg, VA.
1965	ESCO opens Troutdale plant, now Boeing
1966	Iron Fireman sells stoker business to Will-Burt Company, Orrville, OH Product Engineering Company purchased by North Albany (OR) Land Company
1967	Product Engineering Company purchased by Dean Schamp, Clyde Rushing, A. Whitey Michaels & Ed Halberg; added injection molding and aerospace molding to its product line and changed company name to PECO. PECO begins leasing Iron Fireman building for production space.
1969	Portland Wire & Iron Works sell the building. PECO expands operations in the East Plant Building.
2005	PECO moves sanding and finishing processes to the Walker Building.
2013	Astronics Corporation acquires PECO.
2015	Astronics PECO moves all production to Clackamas, OR.

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